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Simmel and the forms of in-dividuality

1 Introduction

The work of Georg Simmel is widely known for the case it makes for a strong connection between modernity and individualisation (see Frisby 1984/2002, 63–80; Lichtblau 1997, 25–38, 83–98; Honneth 2002; Rosa, Strecker, Kottmann 2007, 92–113). In his sociological theory as in *The Philosophy of Money*, in his writings on intellectual history as in his aesthetic and metaphysical essays, a perspective on modern culture is advanced according to which the latter is distinguished from other historical epochs by a peculiar accentuation of individuality. The process of individualisation is generally understood as a progressive release of the individual from forms of community, such as those often identified with the European Middle Ages,¹ that inhibited the development of personal freedom: against dissolution within an encompassing whole, modern individuals sought to detach themselves from levelling social bonds by strongly affirming their own boundaries, their ‘self-responsibility’ and ‘self-contained singularity’ (Simmel 2004 [1918], 249; see also Simmel 1989 [1890]).² Characteristic of this view is the assumption that the historical foregrounding of individuality is an inherently conflictual process. The emergence of the modern individual is thereby regarded not only as the outcome of struggles against previous forms of social organisation, but also as bringing forward new tensions of its own. Although Simmel argued at times that these conflicts have their ultimate foundation in a trans-historical antagonism between the

1 Being aware of the problematic aspects of such account of the medieval period, Simmel preferred to ‘leave undecided whether the Middle Ages actually lacked in such a degree the features of individuality’ and rather stress the latter’s ‘fundamental accentuation’ from the Renaissance onwards (Simmel 2004 [1918], 249).

2 Simmel’s writings are referenced in this text according to their English translations, whenever these are available. All quotations were compared with the German originals (as published in the *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe*) and often modified for the sake of precision. Where an English version was not available, the translation is mine.

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individual and society (Simmel 2007 [1917]; 1950 [1917]), equally crucial to his perspective is the claim that precisely in modernity this opposition achieved its zenith.

It is for no other reason that he so often presented the forms taken by the modern individual in dualistic terms, the most notable of which is the opposition between 18th-century quantitative and 19th-century qualitative individualisms (Simmel 1995 [1901–02]; 2002 [1903]); 1997 [1904/1918], 215–26; 2003 [1912/1918], 151–78; 1950 [1917]; 2004 [1918]). In the latter distinction, in fact a contrast is developed that can be seen to permeate the entirety of Simmel's oeuvre. Such antithesis was already central to his writings even before its explicit articulation as two kinds of individualism – as attested by his essays on money published in the 1880s and 1890s, in which the modern economy was seen to rely on the predominance of quantitative over qualitative dimensions of experience (Simmel 2013 [1889]; 2013 [1896]; see also 2011 [1900–07]). Moreover, Simmel subsequently developed a series of other oppositions that, despite their different analytical backgrounds and spatiotemporal settings, display a homologous structure. In his sociological theory, he advocated for a corresponding differentiation between social and extra-social dimensions of the individual (Simmel 2009 [1908]); his analysis of modern urban and economic life similarly relied on a contrast between intellectual and sensible individualities (Simmel 2002 [1903]); and his late aesthetic and metaphysical essays brought forward a congruent distinction between Romanic and Germanic individualisms (Simmel 2005 [1916]; 2007 [1917]; 2007 [1918]).³

Less visible, however, is the fact that these analyses present not only different figures of *in-dividuality*, with its accentuated sense of independence and self-sufficiency, but also distinct modes of *in-dividuality* marked by an openness to being permeated by something other than oneself. In fact, when one follows the thread of these dualisms in Simmel's work it becomes clear that, despite an initial focus on the boundedness of the *in-dividual*, forms of *in-dividual* porosity come to acquire over time an increasingly significant role. This has decisive consequences not only for the interpretation of his oeuvre but also, as I will argue, for a general assessment of modern life. After all, if the latter can be seen as characterised by an accentuation of particular kinds of *in-dividuality*, it is equally true that different figures of *in-dividuality* have surfaced in connection with, and as

³ Despite the differences one can identify in Simmel's work concerning the notions of *individuality* (i.e. the actual form taken by the individual), *individualisation* (i.e. the social process by means of which individuality is accentuated), and *individualism* (i.e. an ideal that might guide this process), these terms are often employed in a combined or interchangeable manner.

a reaction to, this process. The internal rifts of the modern in-dividual,⁴ as they can be reconstructed from Simmel's work, point thereby to a core aspect of the conflicts of modernity.

2 Quantitative and qualitative in-dividualisms

The distinction between two modern forms of individualism was formulated by Simmel at several moments of his intellectual trajectory (Simmel 1995 [1901–02]; 2002 [1903]; 1950 [1917]; see also 1997 [1904/1918], 215–26; 2003 [1912/1918], 151–78). Each of these texts presents a different point of departure: in 1901, the *political-ideal* starting point arises from the internal contradictions of the ideal of freedom and equality that animated the French Revolution, and which was seen to provide an adequate expression of that historical situation; in 1903, the *historical-cultural* starting point is the modern individual's struggle to preserve its existence against the threat of being swallowed up in a social-technological mechanism; in 1917, the *social-philosophical* point of departure is the fundamental and insoluble antagonism between social and individual life, that becomes especially acute in modernity. Despite these differences, in all such instances modern forms of individualism are grasped as reactions to, and expressions of, the conflicts manifested in European societies since the 18th century. To examine the tensions between and within these ideals amounts, therefore, to probing into some of the main oppositions of modern life: 'The external and internal history of our time takes its course within the struggle and in the changing entanglements of these two ways of defining the individual's role in the whole of society' (Simmel 2012 [1903], 31).

It was, then, as a reaction to the dominant social configuration that a new concept of individuality emerged in 18th-century Europe. In this period, says Simmel, 'individual forces found themselves in the most unbearable antagonism to their social and historical commitments and formations'. Prevalent institutions then appeared as outdated and unfairly constraining, 'as slave shackles under which one could no longer breathe' (Simmel 1995 [1901–02], 50). It was in this context that a *negative* ideal of individual freedom emerged whose premise was a wide-ranging refusal of dominant forms of social organisation. Corporatist and ecclesiastical ties were then considered mainly responsible for coercive and unjust relations among

⁴ Pyyhtinen (2010, 140–4) has previously argued for the presence of an 'in-dividual' in Simmel's writings. As used here, the expression has a different (and complementary) meaning: it does not refer primarily to the duality indivisible/divisible, but rather to the opposition closed/open, or atomised/permeable.

people, so that, as Simmel emphasises, ‘one concluded that with the victory over those institutions [...] all the inequalities in the world would disappear’ (ibid.). Within this framework, existing forms of social organisation were understood not only as unjust but also as artificial: they would consist in external constraints imposed on natural human freedom. Underlying this emerging ideal was, therefore, the notion that it would only take the fall of those social commitments which forced the individual into unnatural paths for society to move from oppression to freedom, from ‘historical unreason’ to ‘natural reason’ (ibid.). A general and negative ideal of freedom, as liberation from the subjugation of prevalent institutions, was premised on a similarly general notion of equality, as the natural condition of every human being on the basis of which a rational society could be founded.

Crucial for the emergence of this ideal was not only the wide-ranging opposition to the established social order, but also the philosophical rationalism of the 18th century, the focus of which was precisely ‘the general man, man in general’:

‘Just as the literature of the revolutionary period continuously speaks of the people, of the tyrant, of freedom in general, just as the “natural religion” contains providence as such, justice as such, divine education as such, so too the universal abstract man [...] is always and everywhere the same, apart from everything that distinguishes human beings from each other’ (ibid., 50f.).

According to this conception, every individual would contain a rational kernel that is essential to itself as well as the same in all human beings. That is why freedom and equality could be regarded as inextricably connected in a single ideal:

‘if man were only set free, then his merely human essence, which the historical commitments and corruptions had covered and distorted, would come forward again as his true self, and the latter would be the same for everyone because it constitutes the universal human being in us’ (ibid., 51).

The liberation of the individual from external constraints was thereby understood as the unshackling of an abstract, rational humanity possessed in equal measure by each and every one.

Equally important for such an ideal was the notion that each human being, in addition to taking part in a common abstract humanity, is and should be an *in-dividual*. In opposition to the surviving norms of the Middle Ages, the 18th-century notion of universal equality did not imply a social *fusion* into which human beings enter as members of a community, as parts of a substantive collectivity. They rather emerge as a set of isolated, legally or axiologically equal individuals. In Fichte’s words: ‘A rational being must *simply be an individual* – but precisely, not *this or that particular individual*’ (ibid.). This ideal is hence *in-dividualistic* in the sense that, against previous forms of direct

subordination of the person to the social whole, it asserts the boundedness and the autonomy, the self-sufficiency and self-responsibility of the individual. Yet it is *quantitative* in the sense that the human being is conceived as possessing the same abstract nature as any other and thereby as a commensurable or interchangeable element, different from others only in a 'numerical' sense.

There is hence an important affinity between this form of individualism and the modern money economy. As the ideal of quantitative *in-dividuality* was defined in opposition to existing social institutions, so the development of the modern economy was also marked by a break with the kinds of social bonds characteristic of the European Middle Ages. Due to its abstract and quantitative character, money *detaches* the elements it connects: slipping as an 'insulating layer' between person and property, as well as between the total personality and the social circle to which it belongs, it allows for a larger development of personal independence (Simmel 2013 [1896], 245). As Simmel remarks, monetary remuneration guarantees in several contexts a higher measure of freedom, since in payment in cash the individual does not deliver the totality of her self, but only the impersonal results of her work. However, this freedom is widely understood as a merely negative one, i.e. as freedom *from* something and not freedom *for* something, given the fact that money establishes a personal domain of reserve and choice which might remain, nonetheless, an empty realm of pure possibility. On the other hand, given its abstract nature money also *reconnects* that which it separates: its status as a universally recognised means of exchange offers 'grounds for an immediate mutual understanding' among human subjects in such a way that, according to Simmel, it would have been partially responsible for the emergence of the idea of the 'universally human' by the end of the 18th century (Simmel 2013 [1896], 51). The same process that made people and things unrelated to each other also created renewed and extremely strong connections among them: since it cannot be immediately consumed, money always points to the other participants in the economic system and, more generally, to the totality of economic exchanges. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the doctrine of freedom and equality could be regarded as the intellectual foundation of the modern economic order, with its formally equal competition between rational, free individuals: 'According to the new theory, the natural order of things saw to it that the unlimited competition of all resulted in the harmony of all interests, that the unrestricted striving after individual advantages resulted in the optimum welfare of the whole' (Simmel 1950 [1917], 83).

This ideal of negative freedom and abstract equality would, however, appear as problematic in the following century. In contrast to quantitative individualism, another conception emerged which dissolved the previous synthesis: the grounding of equality upon freedom, and freedom upon equality, was broken by a renewed emphasis on *inequality*.

'Just as equality in the eighteenth century, so now inequality in the nineteenth only needs freedom to emerge from its mere latency and potentiality and to dominate all of human life. Freedom remains the general denominator even if its correlate is the opposite of what it had been' (ibid., 78).

If freedom can now be connected to inequality, it is because the latter is no longer understood in the same manner. While the 18th century affirmed the individual's negative freedom against the 'external' inequality produced by illegitimate social norms, the 19th century emphasised a form of positive freedom associated with the development of each one's 'internal' inequality in relation to others.

'It seems that, as soon as the ego had become sufficiently strengthened by the feeling of equality and generality, it fell back into the search for inequality. [...] First, there had been the thorough liberation of the individual from the rusty chains of guild, birth right, and church. Now, the individual that had thus become independent also wished to distinguish himself from other individuals' (ibid.).

The emphasis is no longer on being a free individual as *any other*, but rather in being a peculiar one that can be replaced by *no other*.

Despite the differences between these individualisms, they both share a fundamental impulse: that according to which 'the individual seeks its self as if it did not yet have it, and yet, at the same time, is certain that its only fixed point is this self' (ibid., 79). But if 18th-century individualism saw the self as a centre of rational autonomy bounded to a general law equally valid for all, 19th-century individualism found within itself an incomparable and obscure peculiarity. While the former is associated with the 'unquestionable clarity' of 'a conceptually demonstrated rationalism', the latter is oriented by the 'enigmatic unfathomableness' of 'very obscure instincts' (ibid.).

It is no coincidence therefore that, according to Simmel, it was in a work of art that this form of individualism appeared in its first full elaboration. Though intimations of this conception are already displayed in Lessing's, Herder's and Lavater's writings,⁵ it is in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* that one sees, for the first time, 'a world which is based exclusively on the individual peculiarities of its protagonists and which is organised and developed only on

⁵ Even if Simmel associates each form of individualism with a different century in European history, it is clear by his treatment of the subject that this temporal attribution should not be understood in a clear-cut manner: not only intimations of qualitative individualism can be found in the 18th century – and, as we will see, also in the previous ones – but the same applies to quantitative individualism, whose origins can be traced back to earlier times. Moreover, it becomes evident that, for Simmel, both these traditions continued to be developed beyond the centuries in which their clearest expressions emerged.

this basis' (ibid.). Philosophically, says Simmel, this new ideal was expressed in Schleiermacher's claim that each individual is a synthesis of the forces that constitute the universe, yet one that is each time incomparable and entirely unique. Its core idea was 'that the absolute only lives in the form of the individual, and that individuality is not a restriction of the infinite but its expression and mirror' (ibid., 81). As in the previous century, a connection is thus established between nature and the individual. However, the former no longer appears as a homogeneous universal that is equally present within every human being, but rather as an infinite multiplicity of forces expressed within each one in a unique and obscure manner. Hence its association with 'mystical-fatalistic' ideas and its proximity, against 'the bright rationalism of the Enlightenment', with Romanticism (ibid.).

This worldview's characteristic emphasis on singularity did not only apply to the individual, but also to other cultures. Valuing 'the fascinating beauty of the Middle Ages, which had been neglected, and of the Orient, which had been despised by the activist culture of a liberal Europe', the Romanticists were, after Herder, the first to absorb and emphasise the uniqueness of historical realities (ibid.). Such a valuation of singularity was accompanied, however, by an equally accentuated search for *oneness*. Lying behind the interest in cultural worlds different than one's own was the notion that a sort of unity could be achieved, or discovered, that would be more felt and sensuous than reflective and rational. As Simmel emphasises, 'Novalis wanted his "one spirit" to transform itself into infinitely many alien spirits; the "one spirit inheres, as it were, in all objects it contemplates, and it feels the infinite, simultaneous sensations of a harmonious plurality"' (ibid.). It is in this sense that 19th-century individualism is connected to a conception of humanity that highlights not the abstract man-in-general, but 'the concrete totality of the living species' (ibid., 80). But as Novalis' quotation also indicates, the emphasis on the concreteness of sensations led, on the other hand, to an equally accentuated interest in the smallest singularities, in every minor contrast of experience: 'Above all, the Romanticists experienced the inner rhythm of the incomparability, of the specific claim, of the sharp qualitative differentiation of the single element' (ibid., 81f.). Such a tendency was already present in Lavater, who 'so stubbornly pursues the special characteristics of man's visible and inner traits that he cannot find his way back to man's total individuality, but remains arrested in his interest in the completely individual and single' (ibid., 82). Accordingly, the Romanticist 'feels its way through an endless series of contrasts' in such a way that each of them appears, at the instant it is being experienced, 'as something absolute, completed, self-contained, but at the next moment it is left behind' (ibid.).

Both these strivings – toward concrete singularity and concrete totality – will also reflect in a new conception of society, understood as a 'total organism' composed of heterogeneous elements. Such an idea contrasts with the 18th-century

ideal of a social order consisting of atomised, undifferentiated individuals held together by a law that ‘restrict[s] the freedom of the individual to the point where this freedom can coexist with that of every other’ (ibid., 83). This sort of mechanical unity, ‘put together through the mere addition of isolated and equal individuals’, could not be more foreign to the society envisioned by 19th-century qualitative individualism, with its striving for a social whole that rises from and above individual interactions ‘as a unit which cannot be found in the individual, not even as some sort of proportionate quantity’ (ibid.).

A crucial question faced by 19th-century individualism is, then, how to conjugate these two tendencies so as to achieve a concrete social totality that preserves the concrete singularities it assembles. At the level of social relations, the latter can be understood as a project akin to Novalis’ notion of ‘one spirit’ that is able to maintain a harmonious plurality without relinquishing the infinite contrasts in sensation. But, as Simmel here considers it, the path taken by 19th-century individualism was a different one. As a solution to that problem, it advanced a *restrictive* understanding of the qualitative personality, so that the latter could be integrated into the social whole. ‘The individualistic requirement of specificity does not make for the valuation of total personality within society, but for the personality’s objective achievement for the benefit of society’ (ibid., 80). In this framework, the individual does not contribute to social life with all the infinite nuances and contrasts of its concrete personality, but only as bearer of an *objective* task, the performer of a particular role in the division of labour. Though qualitatively specific, this role is nevertheless detached from all others, with which it is bounded only through an abstract law or medium, such as money.

All those ‘infinite contrasts in sensation’ that make up a personality are hence limited to how they come to be expressed in a particular objective performance. Accordingly, the concreteness of society is also restricted, with the harmonious plurality of the social organism being understood as an interrelation between distinct individual labours. Thus conceived, this form of individualism certainly contrasts with the previous one: while the 18th century emphasised the *equal* nature of rational individuals, the 19th rather highlighted the *distinctive* character of each personality. They are both marked, however, by an *atomised* conception of the individual – whether the latter is conceived as a bearer of equal rights, or as someone who performs a specific role within an economically differentiated society. The identification of qualitative individualism with the notion of a society organised on the basis of the division of labour amounts, therefore, to a restriction of its *in-dividual* aspects; it tends to convert this ideal into just another version of quantitative *in-dividualism*. Though it is discernible in Simmel’s account of 19th-century individualism the outline of a fully qualitative *in-dividuality*, this possibility ends up being held in check.

3 The sociological in-dividual

Tensions of this sort are also manifest in Simmel's sociological theory. His writings not only address the differences between those two forms of individualism; they are also *affected* by them. The paradoxical intertwinement between these ideals, as well as the social conflicts they manifest and to which they respond, find expression in the concept of individual articulated by Simmel in his sociology. Nowhere this appears more clearly than in the 1908 excursus on the *a priori* conditions of sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*), whose starting point are precisely the difficulties attached to the fact that sociation consists of relations between *individuals*.

Crucial for Simmel's sociology is the argument that, given the qualitative peculiarity of each human being, a *lacuna* is inherent to their reciprocal relations: it is impossible, after all, to completely know an individuality different from our own. 'It appears as though each person has a mark of individuality [*Individualitätspunkt*] deep down within, that can be reconstructed internally by no one else, for whom this mark is always qualitatively different' (Simmel 2009 [1908]: 43f.). In order to get around this unavoidable gap, each social participant must rely on some kind of generalisation of the other, 'a blurring of her contours' (*ibid.*, 44). The image thus obtained is characterised by dislocations that do not consist in mere illusions stemming from faulty or biased experience, but are rather fundamental modifications which convert a person into a social being. 'We represent all people [...] as the type of human to which their individuality allows them to belong; we think of them, aside all their singularity, under a *general category* that certainly does not encompass them fully and that they do not completely match' (*ibid.*; emphasis added). In social relations, we see the other not according to the whole of its personality but as a bearer of certain roles (officer, colleague, worker, etc.) and attributes (moral or immoral, independent or dependent, etc.). Such a process always involves, furthermore, some kind of typification: 'In order to take cognisance of people, we view them not according to their pure individuality but framed, highlighted, or even reduced by means of a *general type* [...] with which their pure being-for-itself does not coincide' (*ibid.*; emphasis added).

However, the knowledge of another human being via general types does not simply veil her pure being-for-itself. Typification has itself an *individualised* character: a set of general categories is combined so as to lead to a hypothetical construction of the other's personality, thus endowed with a certain unity on the basis of its fragments one is allowed to perceive.

'[T]he view of the other broadens these fragments into what we never actually are purely and wholly. The fragments cannot be seen only juxtaposed, but as we fill in the blind spot in our field of vision, completely unconsciously of course, we construct the fullness of its individuality from them' (*ibid.*).

From a plurality of fragments and their corresponding categories a complex, yet typified, image of the individual is formed which relies on the uniqueness of its real personality but is not identical with it. ‘The praxis of life pressures us to shape the picture of a person only from the bits of reality empirically known; but even that rests on [...] the transformation of the actual fragments into the generality of a type and into the completion of the hypothetical personality’ (ibid.).

This basic procedure, by means of which the other’s personality takes on a knowable and communicable form, functions as an *a priori* of all reciprocal actions between individuals: it is a practical assumption held by them and without which social relations could not take place. This constitutes what Simmel calls the first *a priori* condition of sociation. In line with the Kantian foundations of his 1908 *Sociology*,⁶ Simmel furthermore highlights the *schematic* aspect of those operations of social generalisation.

‘The civilian who meets an officer cannot free herself at all from the reality that this individual is an officer. And, although being an officer may be pertinent to this personality, her image still prejudices toward the *schematic type* comparable to it in the representation of the other’ (ibid., 45; emphasis added).

In this regard, the *a priori* categories of sociation function similarly to the Kantian categories of understanding (*Verstand*) that form the immediately given data into objects of knowledge:

‘Because the generalization is always at the same time more and less than the individuality, [...] those alterations and reformulations are in fact what obstruct this ideal knowledge of the [real] self even while being precisely the conditions by which the relationships that we know alone as social become possible’ (ibid.).

Yet while asserting the significance of these *a priori* generalisations for the establishment of forms of sociation, Simmel points again to their insufficiency. That *lacuna* inherent to reciprocal actions between individuals is somehow bridged, but not entirely solved, by schematic categories. There is always a remainder, something that evades generalisation. Even when the latter takes the form of an individualised type, ‘[h]overing above all this [...] is the idea of a person’s real, absolutely individual indubitability’ (ibid.). As a consequence, everything that resists typification via *a priori* categories will appear as an *extra-social* quality of the person:

⁶ On this issue, see Cantó-Milà 2005, 69–78, 113–5; Köhnke 1996. On the current relevance of such a framework, see Cantó-Milà 2018.

'We know that the civil servant is not only a civil servant, the merchant is not only a merchant, the officer is not only an officer; and this extra-social being [*außersoziale Sein*] – its temperament and its fated outcome, its interests and the value of its personality – may alter very little the essential operations of the civil servant, the merchant, the soldier, and yet it gives opposing aspects to every one of them, always a particular nuance and a social persona permeated by extra-social imponderables' (ibid., 46).

The process of sociation hence leads to a splitting of the individual. While the social being of a person corresponds to the image made of her via schematic categories and types, the extra-social being consists in the qualitative aspects of her 'pure being-for-itself' that do not fit such generalisations. It is no coincidence that these extra-social qualities are so often described in approximate terms – as the 'tone' or the 'imponderables' of the personality, its 'temperament' or 'nuance' (ibid.). They point, after all, to those aspects of the individual which resist categorisation. Crucial for Simmel's sociology is therefore a distinction between 'social' and 'extra-social' whereby the former refers to reciprocal relations mediated by general categories and the latter to the qualitative aspects of the personality that are not incorporated into such schematic types, thus appearing as a realm situated beyond social activity. This *Außerdem*, as Simmel also calls it, refers to the person's 'absolutely individual indubitability' and, as such, to the limits of sociation.

However, this limit itself will be taken into account by the schematic forms of knowledge that make reciprocal actions possible. The fact that 'every member of a group is not only a part of society but also something else' (ibid., 45) is reckoned by the very same typifying categories that mediate relations between individuals. The distinction between social and extra-social being is not simply established by the sociological observer, but practically assumed by the participants themselves. They do not relate to each other only 'as bearers of the social roles falling to them just at that moment', but 'differentiate one another just as much [...] according to whatever degree of that "besides" [*Außerdem*] they possess or permit' (ibid., 46). Social generalisations incorporate within themselves, in schematic form, the recognition of their own insufficiency. This is what constitutes for Simmel the second *a priori* of sociation.

The individual in its full qualitative peculiarity thus appears, in Simmel's sociological theory, as the vanishing point of social life – even if, as just seen, this vanishing point is recognised as such within the schematic forms of sociation. Accordingly, society is defined 'as a *purely objective schema*, [...] as an arrangement of contents and accomplishments' which does not incorporate the individual's entire existence, but only its qualitatively particular, yet detachable, performances (ibid., 49; emphasis added). Society hence appears as 'an interconnection of qualitatively distinct phenomena' which find its clearest example in bureaucracy (*Beamtenschaft*), conceived as 'a definite organization of "positions"

with a predetermined set of skill requirements that exist *detached* from their respective office holders', and in which 'new entrants find unambiguously specific posts, just as though these positions were waiting for them and to which their energies must harmoniously conform' (ibid., 50; emphasis added). Even if, in contrast to the bureaucratic structure, the positions in society are not produced by a purposeful design, its

'phenomenological structure [...] remains an arrangement of elements, of which each person takes an individually defined position, a coordination of objectively and, in its social significance, meaningful [...] functions and functional centres; in this process the purely personal, the inwardly productive, the impulses and reflexes of the real "I" remain entirely outside consideration' (ibid.).

Such a conception of society is, Simmel asserts, practically assumed by social actors and therewith constitutes the third *a priori* of sociation⁷: 'That every individual is directed according to one's own quality in a definite position inside of one's social milieu [...] – that is the presumption under which the individual lives out a social life' (ibid.). Sociation cannot take place without the practical assumption of a correlation between the individual life and its environing social circles, without the presupposition that its intrapersonal particularity is integrated into the life of the social whole and finds a particular place within it. Nowhere does this appear more clearly than in the category of vocation (*Beruf*), which is characterised by the assumption that a 'socially functional activity is consistently the expression of inner capacity, that the wholeness and durability of subjectivity practically objectivises itself by way of its function in society' (ibid., 51). Thus conceived, the category of society assumed by individuals in their social dealings appears as a '*harmony* [...] between the structure and life process of society on the one hand and the individual make up and predispositions on the other', as an '*unbroken interconnected reality*' (*lückenlose Wechselwirksamkeit*) (ibid.; emphases added).

This is, as Simmel emphasises, a *phenomenological* depiction of society and not a psychological one: it refers only to the 'social content', to 'the kind of existence and accomplishments offered objectively socially by every element' (ibid., 50). As in the discussion of the two previous *a priori* conditions, the totality of one's personality – with its unique and unmistakable 'innate qualities, personal associations, and lived destinies' – is, for the most part, left outside the frame. The distinction between phenomenological and psychological perspec-

7 In line with this third *a priori*, Fitzi (2017) developed a wide-ranging interpretation of Simmel's oeuvre as a theory of 'qualitative societal differentiation'.

tives hence recasts the earlier opposition between social and extra-social being: everything that is not expressed in the form of an objective, functional performance appears as a psychological element situated outside the social realm, as an *Außerdem*. Here as well, there is always something that evades schematisation. Even if social life only becomes possible on the basis of an 'unbroken' concept of society, the latter never comes to shape reality without fail or remainder: if this were the case, 'we would have the perfect society – [...] not in the ethical sense or eudemonistic perfection but conceptually: i.e., not the *perfect* society but the perfect *society*' (ibid., 51). As an *a priori* condition of sociation, the category of society is at the same time presupposed in its perfection and imperfectly realised. There is always something in empirical social life that is not entirely grasped by this category, that evades its unbroken interconnectedness. Once again, as Simmel sees it, this is the case of those qualitative aspects of the personality that resist schematisation and manifest a certain 'unpredictability' (ibid.).

To be sure, such a conception of society does incorporate the qualitative peculiarity of each individual: it relies, after all, on the idea that 'there exists a position-and-performance in society for each person, to which one is "called," and an imperative to search for it until one finds it' (ibid.). However, the personality only takes part in society to the extent that it accomplishes an objective performance within a structure of detached and schematised, even if qualitatively differentiated, social functions. Similarly to how Simmel presented the ideal of 19th-century individualism, here solely those qualitative aspects of personal experience are taken into consideration which fit the image of a society organised, as in the modern economy or the bureaucratic structure, in terms of detached roles performed by atomised *in-dividuals*.

As indicated by the presentation of these three *a priori* conditions, Simmel's sociology is structured around a reiterated demarcation between a categorially schematised 'social' and its 'extra-social' remainders. Within this framework, the personality only takes part in social relationships in the shape of a detached and typified *in-dividual*, even if a qualitatively distinct one. And what does not fit this *in-dividual* form can only partake in social life as long as it is itself framed within a categorical distinction – e.g., the one between social and extra-social being. Accordingly, society consists in a schematic structure of detached positions that leaves out a great deal of the 'tones', 'nuances' and 'imponderables' that constitute the personalities involved, as well as, one could say, their reciprocal relations.

This is, however, only half of the story. Such a view is transformed as long as one considers a specific argument presented by Simmel in this excursus. As seen above, while addressing the second *a priori* he argues that the forms of sociation can be classified according to how much of that extra-social element, that *Außerdem*, they admit within themselves. From this perspective, each form of sociation

can be located at a specific point within a continuum of different balances between social and extra-social elements. At one of the poles of this continuum, Simmel locates those kinds of relationship we call love and friendship. Here, the extra-social being – i.e. that which the individual keeps in reserve beyond the activities directed toward the other – approaches the zero point:

‘[T]here is only a single life that can be viewed or lived from two angles, at one time from the inside, from the *terminus a quo* of the subject, then however, while nothing has changed, from the perspective of the beloved, from the category of the subject’s *terminus ad quem*, which absorbs it completely’ (ibid., 46).

Thus conceived, love and friendship are forms of sociation marked by a *total pervasiveness*: here the extra-social component, the *Außerdem* of social activity, vanishes ‘because its content is wholly absorbed in the turn toward the other’ (ibid.). It is as if that *lacuna* which Simmel deemed inescapable, the impossibility of fully knowing another individuality, were here overcome. Each of the lovers or friends presents herself entirely to the other, without reserve, so that their whole personalities enmesh and emerge as *a single life*. Their qualitative nuances and imponderables, their personal temperament and uniqueness are all shared with one another and absorbed in social activity. In such cases, the schematic component of sociation – previously taken as a synonym for ‘social being’ – equally disappears. Given the absence of distance between individuals, they find themselves immersed in a single life immediately given to both of them, so that there is no longer the need for general types as mediating figures between closed, inscrutable personalities. In fact, the opposition itself between a schematised ‘social’ and a qualitative ‘extra-social’ does not hold here. Against Simmel’s own previous assumptions about the *a priori* conditions of sociation, his arguments on love and friendship point thereby to instances in which social life achieves a *non-schematic* form.

Inversely, the distinction between social and extra-social being is particularly intensified in the forms of sociation that Simmel situates at the other pole of the continuum: namely, ‘the phenomena of modern culture as they are determined by the money economy’ (ibid.). While love and friendship represented the vanishing point of extra-social being, where everything is shared and nothing is kept outside the relationship, economic relations are where the *Außerdem* reaches its peak. This is so because in the money economy, says Simmel, the individual approaches the ideal of absolute objectivity as bearer of an economic function:

‘the individual life, the tone of the whole personality, has disappeared from the performance; people become only the bearers of settlements of performance and counter-performance as determined by objective norms, and everything that does not fit into this sheer thingness has also as a matter of fact disappeared from it’ (ibid.).

This form of sociation hence relies on the most radical distinction between social and extra-social being, between schematised individuality and deeper personality. To the extent that one partakes in these relationships merely as a bearer of economic performances, most of her temperament, her qualitative nuances, her deeper mark of individuality is kept in reserve. The extra-social being thus reaches its maximum point: 'The "besides" [*Außerdem*] has fully taken up into itself the personality with its special colouration, its irrationality, its inner life, and it has left to those social activities only those energies, in pure abstraction, which specifically pertain to the activities' (ibid.). Since here what is socially performed by the individual ('social being') is entirely devoid of personal tone, almost the whole of personality is removed to the domain of the *Außerdem* ('extra-social being').

One can find in Simmel's sociology, therefore, a differentiation between two forms of sociation which is homologous to the previous distinction between forms of individualism. On the one hand, relations established within the money economy constitute the institutionalised form of quantitative *in-dividualism*: in them, almost everything that is qualitative about individual life is excluded from the domain of the social and relegated to the domain of the extra-social. There is a gap between the personalities of each of those involved, which can only be bridged by schematic categories and generalisations. On the other hand, love and friendship emerge as forms of sociation in which the opposition between schematic sociality and qualitative extra-sociality dissolves: here, neither the nuances of the personality are relegated to the domain of the extra-social (on the contrary, they fully permeate the reciprocal relations), nor social life is characterised as the domain of schematic categories (it is rather thoroughly marked by those personal imponderables). Love and friendship thus constitute the institutionalised form of qualitative *in-dividualism*: the form of sociation in which personalities fully enmesh and permeate each other to the point of appearing as *a single life*.

Important as it is to bear in mind this distinction between two forms of sociation, it is equally crucial to take into account its consequences for the whole of Simmel's sociological project. The latter relies, as we saw, on the assumption that sociation has a necessary generalising and typological character, and that everything which evades schematisation must recede to the realm of extra-social being. However, while this framework seems suitable to examine quantitative forms of sociation such as the one presented by the modern money economy, it fails to be so concerning relationships, such as love and friendship, in which sociality rather takes on a non-schematised, fully qualitative character. So once again, as in the case of Simmel's arguments on modern individualism, the consideration of forms of qualitative individuality points toward a potential that is simultaneously held in check. Here, as before, the possibility

of qualitative *in-dividuality* is at once presented and *tamed*, i.e. submitted to the general framework of quantitative *in-dividuality*. In such a perspective, the enmeshing of two qualitative *in-dividualities* into ‘a single life’ can only appear as irrational, inscrutable, or extra-social. Simmel’s comments on love and friendship point, nevertheless, beyond his own conception of social life as a schematic relationship between *in-dividuals*.

4 Intellectual and sensible *in-dividualities*

The distinction between the two forms of individuality outlined so far can be further developed on the basis of another set of Simmel’s writings: those dedicated to a diagnosis of modern culture. While his analysis of 18th- and 19th-century ideals presented a contrast between a quantitative *in-dividual* and a qualitative *in-dividual* (even if the latter ended up being significantly restricted in favour of the former), his sociological writings indicated that the human being itself can be split into two parts: a schematic *in-dividuality* and a fully qualitative *in-dividuality* (even if the latter was, for the most part, removed to the inscrutable depths of an extra-social *Außerdem*). As Simmel’s arguments also indicate, such restrictive understanding of qualitative individuality is a crucial feature of bureaucratic structures and economic relations, where only that which takes a schematic form is socially shared, while most qualitative aspects of the personality are kept in reserve. Hence the importance of addressing his diagnosis of modern (economic) life: in the latter, one can find not only a similar distinction between quantitative and qualitative parts of the individual, but also indications of how they might come to interrelate in different social settings.

Indeed central to Simmel’s depiction of modern individuality is a homologous distinction between two forms of social relationship: one marked by the predominance of an intellectual attitude toward the world, and another in which prevails a sensible stance with regard to persons and things. For Simmel, modern culture is characterised by an unprecedented extension of ‘intellectual relationships’ (*verstandesmäßige Beziehungen*) over ‘sensible relationships’ (*Gemütsbeziehungen*) – a process whose psychological consequences become especially clear when one compares the life in the metropolis and in the small town (Simmel 2002 [1903]).

As presented in his famous essay on ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, the differentiation between these two forms of social relationship relies on a corresponding distinction between two psychic agencies (referred to via expressions such as ‘layers of our soul’, ‘psychic organs’ or ‘inner forces’; *ibid.*, 12), one of

them prevailing in each of the respective modes of relation to the world. On the one hand, the psychic agency that Simmel calls *Gemüt* takes root in the 'more unconscious layers of the psyche', which can only accommodate to the changes and oppositions of phenomena through 'commotions and inner upheavals'. The *Gemüt* hence constitutes a more 'sensible' psychic agency, which stands closer to the 'depths of the personality'. On the other hand, the *Verstand* 'has its locus in the transparent, conscious, higher layers of the psyche'. It is a psychic organ more distant from those commotions and upheavals, which makes it 'the most adaptable of our inner forces' (ibid.).

As a psychic agency closely connected to the 'depths of the personality', the *Gemüt* is understood as more primary than the *Verstand*. In order to ground in psychological terms his sociological argument about the preponderance of relations of *Verstand* in modern life, Simmel had thus to provide an *ontogenetic* explanation regarding the development of this psychic agency under certain social conditions. Such a process is analysed from two different perspectives. At first – in what can be called an *energetic* model – the ontogenesis of the *Verstand* is understood as resulting from the impact of shocks from the outside world, in response to which this higher organ is developed as a protective layer. According to Simmel, when subjected to 'the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli', the human being feels an 'intensification of her nervous life' against which she needs to protect herself (ibid.). The more pronounced these conditions, the more distressing it is to react only on the basis of the inner commotions of the *Gemüt*, so that the psychic apparatus is led to the development of a 'protective organ' against the threat of uprooting posed by the constraints and discrepancies of the external environment: as Simmel states, one then 'does not react with the *Gemüt*, but above all with the *Verstand*'. It is by means of this process that, according to him, the intensification of the nervous life results in a corresponding 'intensification of consciousness' (ibid.).

It is clear, therefore, that this general process of differentiation of the psychic apparatus, resulting in the development of a specific agency, the *Verstand*, will be modified according to the intensity of the stimuli present in the external reality which the individual has to confront. Hence, social contexts marked by the occurrence of 'lasting impressions [...] which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts' require a smaller 'quantum of consciousness' and allow, so to speak, a more open and less defensive response by the *Gemüt*; while those contexts in which predominate 'the rapid crowding of changing images [...] and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions' demand a more pronounced action of the *Verstand*, resulting in a more intellectualistic psychic life (ibid.). With its slower, more habitual and more smoothly flowing rhythm, the small town can orient its relations on the basis of mood and feeling,

which ‘develop most readily in the steady equilibrium of unbroken customs’. The metropolis, ‘with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life’, demands in turn a more pronounced action of the *Verstand*, resulting in a more intellectualist form of life (ibid.).

But the predominance of the *Verstand* in modern psychic life is also understood from another perspective. The metropolis is not only characterised by an increased social complexity, with its faster pace of life and its greater stimulation of the senses. It is also the locus of the money economy, whose intrinsic connection with the logic of *Verstand* reveals itself in a set of common features. Both are defined by a ‘pure objectivity in dealing with people and with things’: the *Verstand* is indifferent to all genuine individuality, since, Simmel claims, ‘relationships and reactions [that] result from [individuality] [...] cannot be exhausted with logical operations’ (ibid.); for its part, in the monetary principle there is equally no place for the individuality of phenomena, given that ‘money is concerned only with what is common to all: it asks for the exchange value, it reduces all quality and individuality to the question: How much?’ (ibid.). The money economy and the logical *Verstand* thus appear as examples of a particular kind of relation to the world, a certain form of life that Simmel called ‘intellectual relationship’ (*verstandesmäßige Beziehung*): marked by a pure objectivity, indifferent to the individuality of people and things, this form of life was defined in opposition to another, called ‘sensible relationship’ (*Gemütsbeziehung*), in which the qualitative peculiarity of persons and things is felt, as Simmel states, in its ‘full sensible shading’ (*gemütvollere Tönung*) (ibid.).

One must bear in mind the specific meaning of individuality in this context in order to understand Simmel’s argument. Individuality does not mean here the characterisation of the particularity of a person or thing as a crossing point of general determinations, each of them designated by a logically universal concept. Understood in this way, individuality would remain within the limits of *Verstand*, inasmuch as each singularity would present itself as the mere result of a specific conjunction of objective, universally valid determinations, albeit in distinct measures in each case. It points, instead, to something that escapes this purely objective or quantitative conception of individuality, concerning rather a given quality, a specific ‘colouring’ that cannot be reduced to a ‘general and schematised form’ or a set of them. In other words, the concept of individuality to which Simmel refers in this context is not defined by what is ‘equally attributable to all’, but rather by what is qualitatively ‘peculiar and unschematised’ (ibid., 14).

Each of these two forms of life, as their names indicate, is defined by the preponderance of a particular psychic agency. The contrast between the psychic organs of the *Gemüt* and *Verstand* takes on here a distinct character in relation to the first model: now the difference between them is not only a matter of degree – that is, of

the amount of consciousness involved in each – but rather based on a fundamental opposition in how people and things appear within them. While the *Gemüt* involves a consideration of people and things oriented by their qualities and peculiarities, by their ‘full sensible shading’, the *Verstand* deals with persons and things ‘as with numbers, that is, as with elements which, in themselves, are indifferent, but which are of interest only insofar as they offer an objectively measurable accomplishment’ (ibid., 12). Hence it is frequent in intellectual relationships that a ‘formal justice’ is associated with a ‘brutal harshness’: its objectivity is ‘ruthless’ because, like everything else in this form of life, the parties’ moral attitudes and interests are not subject to ‘any divergence from its set path because of the imponderability of personal relationships’ (ibid., 12f.). In short, while the *Gemüt*’s relationship with reality is qualitative, individualised, attentive to a ‘defined spectrum of colours’, the *Verstand*’s relation is quantitative, general, ‘flat and grey’ (Simmel 2013 [1896], 60; Simmel 2002 [1903], 14).

To this second characterisation corresponds a difference in the underlying mode of ontogenetic explanation. A central premise of Simmel’s argument in this second model – which can be called *dispositional* – is that certain forms of life, once disseminated, contribute to shape the subjects’ psychic structure according to the specific relationship with the world they give rise to. So, the fact that a certain psychic agency displays common traits with a particular form of life would indicate the occurrence of a process of internalisation, via sociation, of the latter’s characteristic logic. Such an argument implies a conception according to which the psychic apparatus deals with the external reality not only by developing a protective layer against excessive stimuli, but also by constituting such layer as an agency that – shaped, so to speak, in the image and likeness of that reality – provides the psychic apparatus with the means to adjust to it. *Verstand*, in this regard, does not constitute solely a psychic organ that ‘preserves subjective life’ (as in the first model), but also an inner force ‘capable of adaptation’ (ibid., 12; emphasis added). It acts as an *instance of mediation* between social reality and the commotions of that deeper, unconscious force called *Gemüt*. Thus, to the extent that these forms of life are incorporated by the *Verstand* and shape it according to their logic, they leave their mark on the psyche as a whole, including the psychic layer closer to the ‘depths of personality’, the *Gemüt*.

One can now see how Simmel’s sociological splitting of the individual into a schematic and socially categorised being, on the one hand, and a deeper and fully qualitative being, on the other, does not only concern its relations with others. It is not only a matter of what is, or is not, shared by the individual within social relationships. The split between a schematic and a fully qualitative self is also an *internal* one. It takes the shape of a psychologically conflictual relation between *Verstand* and *Gemüt* in which the logic of the former can even come to

‘colonise’ that of the latter: by participating in intellectual relationships, as seen above, the individual internalises their schematic and objectifying logic, which then comes to function as an organising principle of the psyche. In economic and bureaucratic forms of sociation, the human being thus becomes schematised not only *for the other*, but also *within itself*. It becomes not only externally, but also internally, an *in-dividual* organised in quantitative terms.

The question, then, is what happens to psychological experience in the opposite form of social relation, namely the one that Simmel called ‘sensible relationships’. This is not, however, a topic that he addressed in this context. While his essay on the metropolis provides a complex depiction of the psychological consequences of modern intellectual life, it does not offer an equally detailed account of sensible relationships and the specific kind of intrapsychic dynamics they entail. In this case, as in his historical and sociological analyses presented above, one can find only scattered and underdeveloped indications of how fully qualitative forms of sociation and *in-dividuality* actually look. Yet this issue can be further articulated by resorting to some of Simmel’s late writings.

5 Romanic and Germanic in-dividualisms

In Simmel’s late works one can find, once more, a contrast between two kinds of *in-dividuality* – now in the form of a distinction between Romanic and Germanic individualisms. This opposition stands out in relation to the previous ones given its cultural-geographical emphasis. While the former referred, either explicitly or implicitly, to antagonisms internal to modernity (Enlightenment *versus* Romanticism, bureaucracy and economy *versus* love and friendship, metropolis *versus* small town), the latter points to a much wider temporal scope, going back to the Renaissance period – and even to classical antiquity – on the Romanic side and to the Middle Ages on the Germanic side. Yet this contrast made its way into modernity, and by articulating it, Simmel expressed an undeniable concern with contemporary issues, not the least of which was the First World War (see Simmel 1999 [1917]).

What is significant for our purposes here is less the cultural-geographical (and somewhat exaggerated) opposition between two peoples or ways of life and more the fact that this distinction noticeably, though for the most part not explicitly, recasts the previous ones. As the 18th-century ideal of freedom and equality defined itself against the then-dominant corporatist and ecclesiastical ties, Romanic individualism is now seen as a reaction to the forms of collectivity that prevailed in the Middle Ages. Attempting to release itself from the binding forms

of medieval community, the Italian Renaissance was marked by a strong accentuation of individual particularity, a striving for presenting oneself as independent and unique. Simmel considers this tendency 'especially well illustrated by the story that for a time at the beginning of the epoch there was no general fashion in men's clothes because everyone wished to dress in a unique fashion' (Simmel 2005 [1916], 89). Accordingly, Renaissance portraits accentuated individual particularity to such an extent that 'the representation of the human being could not be strange, exclusive, or characteristic enough, up to the point of the grotesque' (ibid., 87). And yet, when one looks at the aesthetic representations of Romanic individuals, one might discern a certain uniformity of style, 'a common ethos and attitude to life': seeking to accentuate their individuality, they present themselves at the same time as *bearers of a type*. Along with 'a passionate accentuation of one's own singularity', Romanic individualism hence displays as well a 'basic striving for the general' (Simmel 2007 [1917], 67).

That is not, however, a sign of incoherence. What allows for this conjunction of individual particularity and stylised commonality is, above all, the specific character of the latter. The generality that is strived for in such context is not of a concrete kind: it does not involve a longing for *Gemeinschaft*, a 'collectivity or any practical amalgamation into an encompassing figuration, or a merging of individuals into some greater totality' that would dissolve their individualities (ibid.). Rather, what is at stake is a 'generality akin to the concept': a form or law that determines a number of individual existences, each of which represents it in a certain manner. All freedom, differentiation and individual excellence are thereby sought within the limits of this conceptual generality; they are nothing more than particular manifestations of universal attributes. In the Romanic context, Simmel says, '[a]ll individual characteristics are generalities' and the human being is nothing but 'a plurality of generalities' (ibid.).

For that reason, the Romanic individual displays – as the one articulated by 18th-century Enlightenment – a quantitative character: 'the will to power that infused the individuals of the Renaissance realises itself in a perhaps only *quantitative*, singular increase of traits that in the last analysis are *typical*' (Simmel 2005 [1916], 87). In contradistinction to Simmel's depiction of quantitative individualism, however, its Romanic variety is characterised by a striving for being different from others, for *distinguishing* oneself. In this regard it resembles the restrictive, *in-dividualistic* interpretation of the 19th-century ideal, as well as the individual as performer of a specific role in the division of labour. Significantly enough, Simmel now characterises this orientation toward distinction as a 'sociological' one: indeed, here one finds again that same articulation of typified particularity and schematic generality that was ascribed to the socialised individual in his 1908 *Sociology*. Common to these different figures of *in-dividuality* is, in any

case, the fact that they all rely on a typical and abstract form of generality which provides the measure of either their equality or their inequality.

‘Everywhere [...] where there is comparison (however much its result is diversely exhibited) there are common premises making comparison possible – a common standard that in our case means in particular a common idea of the human of which, so to speak, some quantum is contained in each personality that, however differently arranged, permits all of these incompatible forms to be infused and governed by a sense of common style and general type’ (ibid., 89).

This is a crucial dimension of the contrast between Romanic and Germanic individualisms: for the latter, ‘sociological’ difference vis-à-vis other beings is irrelevant. This form of individualism is marked by a striving for singularity that sharply contrasts with the Romanic focus on the different quantities each one possesses of a plurality of general features. The Germanic individual does not distinguish itself from others on the basis of a comparison made possible by the reference to a law-like generality, but rather affirms the incomparable peculiarity of its being: it ‘seeks individuality only within the unique self, and is deeply indifferent as to whether this implies a type of some kind or to whether individuals can exist more than “just once” in the world in a numerical sense’ (ibid., 68). In this regard, such a conception is akin to the (non-restricted) ideal of qualitative individualism,⁸ as well as to the (allegedly extra-social) indubitable personality and the *Gemüt*-oriented individual of sensible relationships. In the framework of Germanic individualism, ‘an individual life grows from its own roots, responsible for itself alone, unpreoccupied by whatever phenomena such roots might have pushed up among people of any comparable nature’ (ibid.). The ‘roots’ of individuality in this conception thus differ from the set of particular features that characterise the Romanic individual: whereas the latter’s attributes are particular (quantitative) instantiations of general forms, the roots of German individuality are (qualitatively) peculiar, irreducible to any type, concept or general law.

The difference between Romanic and Germanic individualisms reflects, according to Simmel, two different modes of knowledge. The form of cognition characteristic of the latter proceeds by ascribing general categories to an individual life (‘a person is clever or stupid, generous or petty, good-natured or

8 It is no coincidence that Simmel mentions as representatives of Germanic individualism, among others, some of the key figures of 19th-century qualitative individualism: ‘Rembrandt’s depiction of the human figure, fusing soul to body and body to soul; Beethoven’s depths of musical yearning and formative impulse; Herder’s and Schleiermacher’s conceptions of the human essence; Walther von der Vogelweide’s pictures of existence, and those of the German romantics in general, and of Kierkegaard, Ibsen and Selma Lagerlöf’ (Simmel 2007 [1917], 68).

malicious'; *ibid.*, 66). However, this mode of knowledge is only secondary and, so to speak, external. By characterising an individual in terms of a set of general categories,

'what I learn is only that they have manifested themselves yet again in such and such a combination in the case of this particular human being. I do not, thereby, know this human being *from within*, but rather my knowledge flows from concepts that I have *already brought with me*' (*ibid.*; emphasis added).

In order to know which of the concepts already available are applicable to a person, Simmel says, one would have to rely on a form of primary knowledge that does not proceed via general concepts.

'The first stage of this immediate knowledge has already been acquired at the moment in which – in brief – the person enters the room. In this very first moment we do not know particular facts about him, nor any of the aforementioned categories. Nevertheless, we still know a tremendous amount: the person, and that which is unmistakable about the person' (*ibid.*).

This intuitive, 'completely indivisible' mode of cognition is, for Simmel, what characterises the Germanic sensibility in opposition to the Romanic one. Now, among those thinkers and artists taken as representatives of Germanic individualism, one stands out in particular. Rembrandt, to whom Simmel dedicated one of his last books, was viewed as especially capable of giving artistic form to that primary and immediate knowledge. 'Out of his portraits shines above all essentially that which we know about a person at first sight, as something completely inexpressible, as the unity of her existence' (*ibid.*, 67). Whereas Renaissance art is directed toward individual attributes, conceiving the human being as a type or a plurality thereof, Rembrandt's 'understanding of the [personal] totality encompasses to a higher degree a *melting into*, an *empathy*, that, in the moment of contemplation, allows the subject-object setting to immerse into the greater indivisibility of intuition' (*ibid.*; emphasis added). In his artistic works, each depicted moment is grasped not on the basis of logical atemporal forms, but through the qualitative becoming of *this* person, i.e. 'out of the life that is shaped as its own singular stream, even though, of course, fed by countless impersonal inflows' (*ibid.*, 89).

Such emphasis on the qualitative singularity of the person will, however, lead Rembrandt further away from any form of *in-dividualism*. Precisely the focus on the singular stream of an individual life draws him toward the impersonal flows that surround and feed it. This move becomes especially marked, Simmel argues, in Rembrandt's last period. 'Life now is no longer directed through the strongly individualised movement of a soul, but spreads beyond the singular being as such toward a vibrancy that completely overwhelms all

limitations of this particular human life' (ibid., 90). As a result, representation becomes more obscure. While one could still describe Rembrandt's earlier figures in terms of specifiable psychological qualities ("this one is proud," "that one rustic," the "third of superior intelligence"), in a late portrait such as *Titus* this falls away completely: 'everything is flowing, vibrant life with no conceptually fixed, specifiable point therein' (ibid.). To be sure, the focus is still the life of one person. However, the task of representing the latter in its 'pure nakedness' – i.e. in its qualitative aspects and not the quantitative differences in relation to others – demands the painter to follow, so to speak, a path from the singular stream of an individual life to those vibrant flows that overwhelm its limits.

'What is decisive is completely unclear; maybe the rhythm of oscillation of the smallest parts; maybe the relative proportion of the mix of more latent and more current liveliness that is everywhere present. In any case, the essential psychological singularity has receded into the far distance. It now stands at the periphery of life in which the central differences are merely those of the rhythms of its flowing and its powers' (ibid., 91).

The move away from *in-dividuality* thus suggested cannot, however, be fully accomplished in Rembrandt's portraits. Despite their openness to the impersonal flows that feed and overwhelm the depicted individual, they can point to these vibrancies but, as it were, not show where they are coming from. As a result, the portrait acquires a paradoxical form which affirms as much as negates the boundaries of individual life.

'Here is something decisive that remains in the limitation of the personality, but somehow, however, pushes back each describable quality [...]. [I]t is as though the life of this person were admittedly absolutely their own, and not detachable from them, yet raised above all the *individual things* that one may say about them; as though a stream of life flowed that, although not washing over its shores and as though it were as a whole a totality of unmistakable unity within itself, nevertheless creates no wave of singular characteristic form' (ibid.).

While representation remains here within the shores of a personality and its qualitative unity, the latter does not appear as a set of clearly identifiable attributes but rather as flows whose limits are blurred as much as they blur the individual boundaries in which they are located.

But how can one understand, after all, these flows contained within the limits of an individual life and which nevertheless overwhelm it? The answer becomes clear in the moment when Simmel turns away from Rembrandt's individual portraits in order to address his pictures with several figures. Only now, says Simmel, one can speak of the 'mood' (*Stimmung*) in the appearance of a painting. For mood 'is something interior, personal, perhaps something singular

for each, which has nevertheless extinguished all particularity of contents of representation [*Vorstellungsinhalte*]’ (ibid., 100; see Simmel 2007 [1913], 26–9). In the paintings with more than one figure, one can see how those sensible qualities of life that are no longer differentiated, those flows with blurred and blurring boundaries, *permeate each other* and come to appear as a common atmosphere.⁹

‘In *The Jewish Bride*, the figures are like the tones of a chord that is certainly not external to those individual tones; however, they are merged in the chord into a construct that cannot be displayed pro rata in each separate tone. A tender life, as if held still, is entirely contained in each of the two figures and nevertheless continuously overflows them and extends into a shared atmosphere wafting around them’ (Simmel 2005 [1916], 100).

A mood, like a chord, is internal to the individual elements of which it is made; it is contained in each of them and yet also something beyond them. ‘The fact that this sphere is *above* individuality constitutes the form in which it is present *within* individuality’ (ibid.).¹⁰

Here the individual no longer appears as a distinctive element with clear-cut boundaries, connected to others only by means of external, law-like forms. The mood is a ‘dissolved and dissolving sphere’ within which individual life, in its full qualitative character, is both superseded *and* preserved. ‘A higher unity has absorbed the being-for-themselves of the individuals, whose singularity falls away in the face of this unity and yet nourishes it with the ultimate generality of their life’ (ibid., 100–101). The mood corresponds therefore to a form of *in-dividuality* that does not lack personal borders but is nevertheless pervaded by impersonal vibrancies. More precisely, it constitutes a sphere in which the difference itself between personal and impersonal is obscured or complicated.

To the extent that within this shared atmosphere the individualities permeate each other in the most intimate sense, the significance of the mood extends beyond the particular attributes of the fleeting situation. Although the movements and gestures of those involved are certainly transitory, through them a sphere emerges in which these individual lives (even if only for a moment and in a certain sense) come to form a single one.

⁹ On the notions of *Stimmung* and atmosphere, see Rosa 2016, 633–44, and Linkenbach, in this publication.

¹⁰ Simmel’s characterisation of the mood in harmonic terms is congruent with his views on music presented in other essays: ‘Music [...] transcends ideas by representing life immediately. [...] [It] comprehends the tidal flow of its being, its dissonances, its loss and recovery, and its ceaseless movement toward resolution and redemption’ (Simmel 1986 [1907], 92). On this topic, see Kemple 2009.

‘In *The Jewish Bride*, [...] [h]ow the man leans toward the woman and embraces her, how her hand touches his – at once encouraging and calming – this is not a *transitory* movement. At the same time, it is not a typical gesture that, as in classical art, would indicate something general beyond these personalities. It belongs entirely to the individual, but it forms itself initially in that stratum in which the life of the individual arises like a homogenous sphere from the appearance, dissolving all determinations tied to singularities. Now, here this life encloses two related figures and achieves its zenith [...] all the more impressively as it fused them, in a way that is logically inexpressible, into a *shared life* without abandoning its source in each separate figure’ (ibid., 101; emphasis added).¹¹

6 Conclusion

By following the thread of Simmel’s different contrasts between forms of individuality, one can see how a depiction of the quantitative *in*-dividual is repeatedly invoked as a crucial feature of modern social life and its main institutions, such as the money economy and bureaucratic organisations. Equally remarkable is that, in this context, even one’s qualitative peculiarity can come to be shaped in such a way that the person assumes a schematised, atomistic, *in*-dividualised form – as bearer of a singular, yet objective achievement in a money-mediated division of labour, or as member of a totality structured on the basis of particular detached positions. As we saw, this understanding of the individual and its relations with others comes to dominate Simmel’s own conception of sociology, where schematic individuality tends to be considered synonymous with social being. Yet Simmel’s writings also recurrently display the figure of a qualitative *in*-dividual whose life is permeated by the lives of others. In his comments on the Romantic project of a concrete whole as a harmonious plurality of infinite singular contrasts; on love and friendship as forms of sociation in which a single life emerges that absorbs the personalities’ being-for-themselves; on *Gemüt*-based relationships in which persons and things are considered in their full qualitative, unschematised shadings; and on the mood (*Stimmung*) as a sphere in which two separate lives are superseded *and* preserved within a shared one – in all these figures, a dimension of sociality comes into view that does not simply *eliminate* the boundaries between individuals (and their properties), but rather *blurs*

¹¹ If, as Podoksik (2010, 145) correctly observed, ‘Simmel’s final notion of individuality may [...] be seen in terms of a constant tension between the idea of separate and unique individuality and the idea of individuality as a reflection of the totality of life’, the reference to the *in*-dividual’s situatedness within a shared mood allows – so I argue – to preserve such a tension *and* supersede it.

them to the point where they enmesh and constitute a common concrete totality without entirely losing sight of their concrete singularities.

Thus conceived, the *in-dividual* appears indeed to be more prominently featured in certain forms of sociation or social milieus (e.g., love and friendship, the small town). But it is not at all exclusive to them. *In-dividuality*, as Simmel understood it in his late work, constitutes a primary and intuitive mode of relation to the world that can be associated in different ways with secondary modes of relation, which involve *in-dividuals* with definite attributes and bounded by general laws or forms. It refers, in other words, to a qualitative *common* life that can come to be shaped and articulated into schematic *universals*. How these two dimensions of sociality (intuitive and categorical, common and universal, *in-dividual* and *in-dividual*) interrelate will then define the lineaments of each form of life. In this regard, characteristic of modernity is the fact that highly schematic and quantitative forms of *in-dividuality* predominate to such an extent that a qualitative common life might come to appear as non-existent or only possible in very limited forms, as inscrutable or removed to the depths of personal intimacy. It is as if the experience of *in-dividuality* could take place solely in residual and extraordinary phenomena, or else in the restricted (and actually *in-dividual*) form of schematically detached positions and properties. If this is correct, then it does not come as a surprise that a longing for extraordinary *in-dividual* experiences might arise precisely as a result of this ordinary dominance of *in-dividual* forms. One can thus understand why modern life appears, for Simmel as much as for us, to take its course ‘within the struggle and in the changing entanglements of these two ways of defining the individual’s role in the whole of society’ (Simmel 2012 [1903], 31).

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